Research on Learning Strategies in Arabic Language Education

• *Dr. Muhammad Zaid Malik*

Abstract:

The learning of Arabic language like any other foreign language contains four main aspects; reading, writing, speaking and understanding while listening.[1] *This learning process can be enhanced if the most appropriate Learning Strategy is used.*

In this paper the most appropriate Learning Strategy of Arabic Language is suggested. The course outlines for Arabic language are thoroughly studied and several professors and experts of Arabic Language from Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Sudan are interviewed. The author, who himself has vast experience in teaching Arabic language, also had the opportunity to sit in the Arabic language classes to observe various strategies and methodologies adopted by different professors while teaching Arabic. In this paper the time spent on teaching Arabic to the students is also discussed. The appropriate size of the class room i.e., the number of students in Arabic language class also matters in improving the quality of Arabic among the students. The matter of teaching Arabic in Arabic only or in the native language of the students will also be touched in here.

As the time has changed and the world is moving ahead on a fast pace, it seems necessary to apply the "Direct Method" while teaching Arabic or any foreign language.[2] *This paper will shed light on what is meant by "Direct Method". The idea of making the student sit and memorize the dry rules of grammar has become obsolete. The idea of telling the student what part of the phrase is subject or predicate, or what is object and what is a noun or verb, may come later. The idea of memorizing the bulk of new vocabulary in the beginning can also be postponed. Hence a paradigm shift is needed here while talking about the Methodology of Teaching Arabic Language, under the heading of "Direct Method".*

Introduction:

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All Praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the universe, who has created man, taught him how to speak and revealed the Qur'ān in pure Arabic language.

Many blessings and peace be upon our beloved Prophet Muhammad, the most eloquent among the Arabs.

It is a well-known fact that Arabic is the language of Islam and the Muslims since the advent of Islam, more than 1400 years ago.

The holy Qur'an, the Constitution of the Muslims, was revealed in Arabic and the last Prophet of Allah spoke Arabic. Moreover it is the oldest alive (surviving) language that did not go through any change. It continued to be the vessel for Islamic Civilization throughout fourteen centuries. The Arabic language has earned a high rank among the few international languages of the world. Hence Arabic is not only the language of religion and civilization, rather a language of international communication also.[3]

The world in the 21st century has entered a new era of communication and information, and thus has undergone an enormous exchange of thought and knowledge. Human beings are now much more interested in having dialogues with each other. Procurement of knowledge has become easy even for an ordinary person.

Knowing more than one language is like having more than five senses. It helps a person to see the world in a bigger picture than his regional and limited world. So to keep up with the fast pace of the modern world that has shrunk now into a village like entity, we have to know more than one language.[4]

It is also helpful in safeguarding ones' interests if he knows the language of the people he/she is dealing with. The Prophet (SAW) said 'Whoever knows the language of a nation, keeps himself safe from their tricks'.[5]

The scholars of Islam have made it very clear to the people interested in acquiring firsthand knowledge of Islam that the understanding of the Qur'an, the Word of God and the understanding of *Sunnah*, the practical demonstration of the Word of God, are the pre-requisites for the correct understanding of Islam.

To understand the both fundamental sources of Islam, the major problem that one faces is knowledge of Arabic language. The holy Qur'ān and *Sunnāh* are both revelations from God upon His last Prophet Muhammad (SAW). They are in a classical and very literary Arabic language. Even a native speaker of Arabic, or having the knowledge of journalistic Arabic, cannot comprehend the full meaning of the revealed text whether it is revealed in heavenly words like the Qur'ān or in heavenly meanings like the *Sunnah*. Rather a person who has even studied classical Arabic systematically, is unable to comprehend and interpret the Word of the Qur'ān or *Sunnāh* in a contemporary situation if he/she does not have knowledge of the history and circumstances relevant to the revelation of these Words.[6]

About the Qur'ān Allah the Almighty says:

وَلَقَدْ نَعْلَمُ أَنَّهُمْ يَقُولُونَ إِنَّمَا يُعَلِّمُهُ بَشَرٌ لِسَانُ الَّذِي يُلْحِدُونَ إِلَيْهِ أَعْجَمِيٌّ وَهَذَا لِسَانٌ عَرَبِيٌّ مُبِينٌ

"And indeed We know that they (pagans) say: It is only a human being who teaches him (Muhammad). The tongue of the man they refer to is foreign, while this (the Qur'an) is a clear Arabic tongue".[7] While about the *Sunnāh* the Prophet (SAW) said: "I am the most eloquent among the whole Arabs, moreover I am from Quraish".[8]

I read the course outlines of Arabic language adopted by various universities and colleges of the world thoroughly and decided to do some field study.

In the course of this study I also met several professors of Arabic who are currently teaching Arabic in International Islamic University, Islamabad and King Saud University, Riyadh – Kingdome of Saudi Arabia and interviewed them before writing these lines. They are:

1- Dr. Muhammad Hammad, Faculty of Arabic Language, International Islamic University-Islamabad. (He is originally from Egypt).

2- Dr. Habib ur Rahman Asim, Director ALT and Professor of Arabic Language, International Islamic University-Islamabad, (from Pakistan).

3- Dr. Hafiz Muhammad Bashir, Deputy Dean Faculty of Arabic and Professor of Arabic, International Islamic University-Islamabad, (from Pakistan).

4- Prof. Muhammad Akram Ghurab, Faculty of Arabic Language, International Islamic University-Islamabad, (from Egypt).

5- Prof. Muhammad Iqbal, Faculty of Arabic Language, International Islamic University-Islamabad, (from Pakistan. I sat in his class as an observer also).

6- Prof. Abul Wara, Faculty of Arabic Language, International Islamic University-Islamabad, (from India).

7- Dr. Abdul Mun'im, Faculty of Arabic Language, International Islamic University-Islamabad, (from Sudan).

8- Prof. Dr. Muhammad Abdul Khaliq Muhammad Fadhl, Institute of Arabic Language, King Saud University, Riyadh – Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (from Sudan).

Text Books

Right now several text books are used in various colleges and universities of Pakistan. The students of the Faculty of Management Sciences (FMS), Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS), and Faculty of Applied Sciences

(FAS), in International Islamic University, Islamabad, are studying Arabic through some small books that are written by the local professors of International Islamic University-Islamabad.

The books that are taught to the FMS, FSS and FAS students are:

1- Lisaan ul Qur'ān (the language of the Qur'an), a 76 page, Urdu and Arabic mixed, black and white booklet, by Prof. Habib ur Rahman Asim, Faculty of Arabic Language, International Islamic University, Islamabad (from Pakistan).

2- Lughat al-Qur'ān al-Karim (The language of the Noble Qur'an), a 125 page, black and white book, by Dr. Inam ul Haq Ghazi, Faculty of Arabic Language, International Islamic University, Islamabad (from Pakistan).

3- Mukhtarat min al-Qur'ān (Selections from the Qur'an). This is a stapled photo copy of 28 pages. The first 5 pages contain the Arabic course outline and the rest contain few selected verses from the holy Qur'ān including the second half of the 30th part of the Holy Qur'an, compiled by Prof. Habibur Rahman Asim, Prof. Inam ul Haq Ghazi and Dr. Muhammad Bashir, all from the Faculty of Arabic Language, International Islamic University, Islamabad (all from Pakistan).

I also found out that the Arab teachers are sad and unhappy with the situation Arabic language is going through. They are not optimistic from the present situation. According to one of them the Arabic language and the Arabic language teachers have become targets of mockery from the students of International Islamic University, Islamabad.

Suggestions:

1- Text Book

Knowing a language and excelling in it is one thing but being an expert in exploring the ways of teaching it to those who do not know Arabic, is completely different thing. I think that it needs many scholars who should be experts in "Exploring the ways of Teaching Arabic" to sit together and design a course on Arabic. One of the good books that is designed for teaching Arabic as a second language which I found very useful, has three volumes and every volume makes a level. The name of the book is:

Al-Arabia Baina Yadaik (Arabic Language in Front of You).

This book is written by the most prominent scholars of the Arabic language, from Saudi Arabia and Sudan. These scholars are:

1- Dr. Abdur Rahman bin Ibrahim al-Fawzan (from Saudi Arabia and teaches in the Institute of Arabic Language, King Saud University, Riyadh – Kingdome of Saudi Arabia).

2- Professor Mukhtar al-Tahir Husain (from Sudan and teaches Arabic in Umm al-Qura University, Makkah - Kingdom of Saudi Arabia).

3- Prof. Dr. Muhammad Abdul Khaliq Muhammad Fadhl (from Sudan and teaches in the Institute of Arabic Language, King Saud University, Riyadh – Kingdome of Saudi Arabia).[9]

All these above mentioned scholars of Arabic language worked on this valuable project under the supervision of Dr. Muhammad bin Abdur Rahman Āl al-Shaikh.

I have seen these three levels. They are beautifully printed with colored pictures to explain the lessons. They also have audio tapes to explain the correct pronunciation of the Arabic words and phrases.

I personally met with Prof. Dr. Muhammad Abdul Khaliq Fadhl (from Sudan, and one of the authors of this book) who told me after thanking Allah the All Mighty, that some 300 educational institutes of the world have adopted this book as their text book for their Arabic Learning Program.

So instead of re-inventing the wheel we may learn from others and borrow the technology that has already been achieved and is widely used now.

In my humble opinion the course of Arabic language that is taught to the students of various colleges and universities of Pakistan is not only an unsuccessful attempt to re-invent the wheel rather an obsolete way of teaching Arabic. It does not serve the purpose; hence we do not need it.

2- Adopting of a New Strategy in Teaching Arabic:

Chinese is considered one of the most difficult languages of the world,[10] but still the experiments show that if you teach Chinese for 3 hours/week, for 3 years, it will be enough for the learner to tell what he/she wants in Chinese.[11]

While teaching Arabic we need to teach our students the language through "Direct Method." By direct method I mean the method through which a child learns how to speak for the first time, from his or her mother. That is to hear and practice through uttering the short sentences or phrases repeatedly or through short stories. The idea of telling the student what part of the phrase is subject or predicate, what is object and what is a noun or verb, comes later. The idea of accumulating the treasure of new vocabulary also comes later.

Sometimes we ask the students to memorize the rules of the grammar then we start telling them the reasons for those rules and ask them to memorize the rules with their reasons, so much so that when the time for using those rules comes (the time of speaking Arabic) the student becomes confused and shows inability to speak Arabic. He/she is drowned in the ocean of grammatical rules.

3- Our Objective of Teaching Arabic

We need a paradigm shift here. We need to determine what we want; what is our objective behind teaching Arabic. If it is to teach Qur'ān and *Tafseer* than we have very useful books compiled by the scholars of this field. For example Mr. Naim M. Husain and Prof. Abdul Jabbar Shakir have compiled a good book that contains selected verses of the Holy Qur'ān on 48 different topics.[12]

But if the objective behind teaching Arabic is to enable the student to start talking in Arabic in a way that after he/she completes the course, he or she is able to tell his/her name, ask other person's name, tell his/her address, ask other's address, or ask directions, or buy or sell something or know how to be familiar with Arab environment at the airport or market place, or at a restaurant he is able to tell what he wants to eat or he/she can tell a taxi driver where he/she wants to go, then we need to change the present course of Arabic. In case we need both; the Arabic language (as a language) and as the means to understand the Holy Qur'an, then we need to set a committee of senior teachers of Arabic and Shari'ah to design that course. It should not be an individual's effort. I have spoken with some teachers on this topic and they are ready to make a committee.

As a matter of fact it is proved that Arabic is the only language of the world that did not change as compared to other languages. With exception of few words of vocabulary that have entered Arabic due to new inventions, this is the same language spoken by the holy Prophet peace be upon him, more than 1400 years ago. A book that can help in learning the genuine (*Fusha*) Arabic can be equally good for learning the Qur'anic Arabic.

So in my humble opinion the book I mentioned above, i.e. ***Al-Arabiyyah Baina Yadaik,*** is good for achieving both ends, i.e., this is the book that can help in learning the genuine (*Fusha*) Arabic and is equally good for learning the Qur'anic Arabic also.

4- Teaching Arabic in Arabic:

The Arabic should be taught in Arabic only, not in Urdu or English. During my visit to some Arabic language classrooms, I found that majority of the Pakistani teachers were teaching Arabic in Urdu or English languages. I was interviewing one of the Arab teachers who teaches Arabic in the International Islamic University, Islamabad (Dr. Muhammad Hammad, Faculty of Arabic Language, International Islamic University-Islamabad, who is originally from Egypt), he gave me a practical example of his daughter. She came from Egypt knowing nothing of English language. A Pakistani teacher who knew nothing of Arabic, taught her English in only English language and she picked up English so quick that in a matter of few months she was able to talk in English. In this regard I would suggest that the Arab teachers should speak pure (Fus'ha) Arabic only and the non-Arab teachers also be advised to teach Arabic in Arabic language only.

5- Teachers Training Program:

It is very important that we first train the teachers how to teach Arabic and then let them go to the class room. A junior teacher should be attached with a senior teacher for one year. As we have the good precedence of house job and apprenticeship for the doctors and lawyers respectively, we need to apply the same rule on teachers also. We may have special programs for teachers' training also.

I think, we need to reserve a special time of the academic year for Arabic Teachers Training only. It may also be arranged in summer vacations.

6- Speakers Bureau:

This could be an extracurricular activity or a built in program in the course at the end of every semester, in which the students will be required to present a 3-5 minute talk in Arabic on any pre-agreed topic. It could be a big event in which all the Arabic teachers are invited with the presence of one or more well known scholars to judge the quality of the Arabic Language that is taught.

7- Need of Creating Arabic Literary Environment:

When I was studying in International Islamic University, Islamabad, in late eighties, we the students had this impression (we were also told) that it is not allowed to speak any other language, on campus, except English or Arabic. I personally believe that even if this rule is loosely implemented it will help a lot towards creating the Arabic environment.

I remember when we were in Saudi Arabia, in early 1980s, my father (Dr. Malik Ghulam Murtaza Shaheed)[13] used to specify a week or two in which we were all (the family members) required to speak Arabic at home. My father, I and my younger brothers knew Arabic. The idea was to teach Arabic to my mother and sisters. They were forced to learn it because we created that environment for them. They did not only start learning Arabic rather they developed the urge to learn more so they got admission in the Saudi government's evening schools program for teaching Arabic to adults.[14]

One of the successful means of drawing interest of the students towards Arabic is to post some colorful posters in Arabic language at different places of the premises, carrying good words or idioms. Some good movies in Arabic could be made part of the curriculum and the internet and dish net could also be used for this purpose.

8- Need of Creating Brotherhood/Sisterhood Club (Mu'akhāt)[15]

In this club we may require every non-Arab student to have his/her brother/sister from an Arab student. They will meet once a week at least and converse in Arabic only. As the Arab students are less in number than the non-Arab students, one Arab student may mentor more than one student.

Conclusion:

Arabic in my opinion, which is based on personal experience, is easy to learn. It just needs to adopt the right method which is the Direct Method. The way to adopt the direct method is to create as much as possible the Arabic environment. The student should be forced to listen to Arabic and Arabic only in the classroom of Arabic language. The student should be treated as a child and made to listen and repeat the small Arabic sentences and phrases again and again.

Acknowledgement:

The researcher would like to thank the Deanship of Scientific Research, King Saud University, Riyadh – Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, for the support offered to this research.

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[2] This method is adopted roughly by some great scholars of Arabic language like Dr. V. Abdur Rahim who taught Arabic language for decades in the Islamic University of Madina, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The author was fortunate to meet with him many times and get benefitted from his experience. See for details: Abdurrahim, V. (1999), *Arabic Course for English-Speaking Students*, Leicester: UK Islamic Academy. See also: Abdullah, F. Ibrahim. (1999), *Iqra Arabic Reader.* Chicago: Iqra International Educational Foundation. Moreover see: Fawzan, Abdurrahman and others. (2004), *Al-Arabia Baina Yadaik*, Riyadh: Ministry of Education.

[3] Sini, Mahmood and others, *Al-Arabiyyah li al-Nashieen.* Riyadh: Ministry of Education and King Saud University (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia).

Besides Dr. Mahmood Sini, two other professors also participated with him in authoring this book. They were Nasif Mustafa Abdul Aziz and Mukhtar al-Tahir Husain. This is a series of six books for students along with books for the teacher and attached audio tapes. This is a supplementary series for a previous series by the same authors. These three professors authored previously another series of 'Uhibbu al-'Arabiyyah', which was aimed for the students of age group 6 – 11 while *Al-Arabiyyah li al-Nashieen* is for age group 11 – 17.

[4] Ghori, Muhammad A. (2010), *Dirasah Naqdiyyah lima tamma Tarjamatuhu min al-Urdiyyah ila al-Arabiyyah, al-Allama Iqbal wa al-Imam Maududi Namuzajan,* Islamabad: International Islamic University. P 11.

[5] 'Ulwan, Sulaiman bin Nasir says: This is not a Hadith but it has a valid meaning, as the Prophet peace be upon him ordered Zaid bin Thabit to learn Syriac language (Musnad Ahmad: 5/182). See for more detail: http://www.ahlalhdeeth.com

[6] Qazi, A. Ahmad (2008), *How Best To Study The Qur'an.* Bangalore: Iqra Welfare Trust. P. 21. For more details see: Maududi, Abu al-A'la. (1991), *Tafheem al-Qur'an,* Lahore: Idara Tarjaman al-Qur'an, Vol. 1, the forwards. See also: Muhsin Khan (nd), *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahīh al-Bukhari,* Madina: Islamic University, Vol. 1, The Preface.

[7] The Holy Qur'an, 16: 103.

[8] Asqalani, Ahmad b. Hajar. (1964), *Al-Talkhees al-Habeer,* Cairo: Sharika al-Tiba'ah al-Fanniyyah.

[9] Prof. Dr. Muhammad Abdul Khaliq Muhammad Fadhl is the most senior in this team of authors. The author met him several times and interviewed him.

[10] Yana Filimonova, (2012). *Which foreign language most difficult to learn?* For full article see link: www.Pravda.Ru

[11] J. Jessica**,** *HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO LEARN MANDARIN CHINESE*? Yahoo! Answers, www.yahoo.com

[12] Approximately one third of this book was used in "Summer Program 2006 in Arabic and Islamic Studies", as reading material for Islamic Studies – 1.

[13] He was a great religious scholar and had various television programs on religion. He was martyred by some terrorists in Lahore (Pakistan) on 7th of May, 2002. To read more about him see my book 'Dr. Malik Ghulam Murtaza Chand Yaden Chand Mulaqaten'.

[14] The Saudi government has a successful program of eradicating illiteracy (محو الأمية), in almost all cities and towns of the Kingdom. This program operates for adults in the public schools as evening shift.

[15] It will be a noble activity as it would be like following the footsteps of the holy Prophet when he migrated to Madina and made each and every Migrant (Muhajir) a brother to a native of Madina (Ansari). This making of brotherhood was called 'Mu'akhat'.